United Nations E/2010/78

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
21 May 2010
English
Original: French

Substantive session of 2010
New York, 28 June-23 July 2010
Item 2 (c) of the provisional agenda*
High-level segment: annual ministerial review

Letter dated 20 May 2010 from the Permanent Representative of the Congo to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Economic and Social Council

I have the honour to transmit to you, herewith, the national report of the Republic of the Congo on gender equality and the empowerment of women (see annex), to be presented at the annual ministerial review scheduled for the high-level segment of the 2010 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council.

The Republic of the Congo should be grateful if the present letter and the report contained in the annex could be circulated as a document of the Economic and Social Council under item 2 (c) of the provisional agenda.

(*Signed*) Raymond Serge **Bale**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

* E/2010/100.

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Annex to the letter dated 20 May 2010 from the Permanent Representative of the Congo addressed to the President of the Economic and Social Council

National report of the Congo on gender equality and the empowerment of women

Contents

Page

Summary ... 3

1. Introduction ... 5
2. Objectives and methodology ... 5
3. Main strategies for promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women ... 7
4. Assessment, progress achieved, constraints, lessons learned and challenges in implementing strategies ... 9
   - 4.1. Reduction of gender inequality in primary and secondary education ... 9
   - 4.2. Improvement of maternal health ... 9
   - 4.3. Equal participation in administrative and political life ... 11
   - 4.4. Equal participation in economic life ... 15
   - 4.5. Reducing violence against women and girls ... 18
   - 4.6. Strengthening of institutional mechanisms ... 19
5. Partnerships and funding requirements ... 20

Conclusion ... 21

Summary

In 2008, the Republic of the Congo drafted, adopted and began implementing a poverty reduction strategy paper, which is the coherent, consensual and single umbrella for its overall economic, social and political development policies. The poverty reduction strategy paper, a tool for negotiating with development partners, ensures coherence between sector and thematic policy papers aimed at effectively reducing poverty by 2015, in accordance with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). To that end, the National Gender Policy and Plan of Action 2009-2013 was drafted and adopted. The Government's overall objective is to reduce gender inequalities, in particular, by giving women greater economic, social, cultural and political power.

An analysis of the indicators shows that after the conflicts of the 1990s, progress was achieved with regard to gender inequalities in primary and secondary education. At the primary-school level, the gender parity index was 0.92 in 1990, 0.84 in 1995, 0.90 in 2000, and 0.92 in 2007. In the "*collège*" phase of secondary school, that figure was 0.80 in 1990, 0.82 in 1997 and 0.81 in 2007. In the "*lycée*" phase of secondary school, it was 0.35 in 1991, 0.53 in 2000 and 0.60 in 2007. As a result of that progress, gender parity by 2015 may be possible at the primary school level but will be difficult to achieve at the secondary school level.

As for maternal health, the maternal mortality rate remains high. Estimated at 890 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in 1990, it rose to 1,100 in 2002 and dropped to 781 in 2005. Current efforts are not sufficient to ensure achievement of the Goal by the target date, however, without scaling up current strategies.

With regard to equal participation in administrative and political life, the distribution of power at the executive, legislative, judiciary and political levels is very uneven. Since the 1990s, the percentage of seats held by women in Parliament went from 7.9 per cent in 1991, to 7.12 per cent in 1992, 24.3 per cent in 2002 and 21.2 per cent in 2007 and 2008. Female representation in the Government was 5.0 per cent in 1991 and 9.0 per cent in 1995; since the early 2000s, it has held steady at 13 per cent. Noteworthy, however, are the Government's political will and the zeal with which women are attempting to reverse these trends.

Concerning equal participation in economic life, Congolese legislation guarantees women's equal access to employment, equal pay and the right to maternity leave. Women in the informal sector, however, must grapple with a number of difficulties, in particular regarding access to credit through the formal financial system. Women's financial independence cannot become a reality without an overhaul of national commercial law and lending policies, taking into account women's needs and motivations, and the constraints they face.

With regard to violence, despite the existence of a legal framework affirming international obligations, acts of violence abound and are apparently regarded as commonplace. Action taken thus far will not serve to reduce violence against girls, adolescents and women unless punitive legislation is enforced.

With regard to the strengthening of institutional mechanisms, the Congo has had a Ministry for the Advancement of Women and the Integration of Women in Development since 1992. The achievement of gender equality, however, is dependent upon its mainstreaming into the policies, programmes and projects of ministerial departments.

With regard to partnerships, the Government works with non-State actors, development partners and donors. They will provide technical support and financial assistance for the implementation of the Government's gender policy pursuant to the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. Congo's recent attainment of the completion point under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC) sets the stage for the development of such partnerships.

1. Introduction

1. At the 2005 World Summit, the Heads of State and Government requested the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations to ensure follow-up of the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits, including the internationally agreed development goals, and hold annual ministerial-level substantive reviews to assess progress.

2. To that end, the Government of the Republic of the Congo volunteered to give a presentation on the national development strategies it has adopted and implemented with the aim of reducing gender inequalities and disparities in development sectors.

2. Objectives and methodology

3. The purpose of this national report is to review and assess national development strategies implemented with a view to achieving the Millennium Development Goals in general and promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women in particular.

4. The goal of the exercise is to: (i) familiarize the development community with the policies and situation of the Congo; (ii) provide feedback to the Congo on its performance; (iii) share lessons learned and replicable successful policies and good practices.

5. The drafting of this report was a participatory process. The initial draft done by a national consultant was reviewed, fleshed out and approved by representatives of Government authorities, civil society and development partners at a national workshop held in Brazzaville on 28 and 29 April 2010.

3. Main strategies for promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women

6. The struggle for the emancipation of Congolese women, waged since independence by various female leaders and the Union révolutionnaire des femmes du Congo (Revolutionary Union of Congo Women) and carried on by women's civil society organizations, culminated in the adoption of legislation in favour of women.

7. With regard to the number of women in the Congolese population (51.7 per cent while men account for 48.3 per cent of the population), national opinion recognizes that gender equality is not merely a question of rights but also a challenge of sustainable human development.

8. In that context, the Government incorporated gender issues into its poverty reduction strategy paper and the National Plan for the Achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in the Congo. Those two papers are complemented by a national gender policy. The Government's overall objective is to reduce gender inequalities, in particular, by giving women greater economic, social, cultural and political power.

9. In September 2002, the Congolese Government's decision to draft a poverty reduction strategy paper was driven mainly by its anxiousness to have a coherent, consensual and single umbrella for its overall economic and social development policies. This is the framework for drafting, implementing and assessing policies

capable of effectively reducing poverty by 2015, in accordance with the Millennium Development Goals.

10. Thus, the poverty reduction strategy is based on the following five strategies: (i) improvement of governance, consolidation of peace and security; (ii) promotion of economic growth and a stable macroeconomic framework; (iii) greater access of populations to basic social services; (iv) improvement of the social milieu; and (v) intensification of efforts to combat HIV/AIDS.

11. In the poverty reduction strategy paper 2008-2010, gender comes under the sectoral analysis of governance, together with: (i) political governance; (ii) administrative and judiciary governance; (iii) economic and financial governance; (iv) decentralization; (v) departmental and local development; (vi) environment; and (vii) peace and security.

12. The strategies adopted include: (i) elaboration and implementation of the national gender policy; (ii) promotion of gender parity in education and effective involvement of women and men, girls and boys in decision-making at all levels; (iii) combating all forms of violence against women; (iv) promotion of women's rights; and (v) greater economic empowerment of women. Given its cross-cutting nature, gender is also taken into account in other sectors and themes at both the analytical and strategic stages.

13. In drafting the poverty reduction strategy paper 2011-2013, gender, as a cross-cutting issue, will be considered within the context of each sector.

14. Millennium Development Goal 3: "Promote gender equality and empower women", unlike the others, does not concern a specific sector or issue, as gender equality and empowerment of women underlie each of the other seven Goals.

15. This Goal will be achieved primarily through: (i) the reduction of gender inequality at all educational levels; (ii) the improvement of sexual and reproductive health; (iii) equal participation in administrative and political life; (iv) equal participation in economic life; and (v) reduction of violence against women.

16. The 2008 national gender policy defines the institutional framework and mechanisms in which equality and equity polices and their related programmes are elaborated, implemented, monitored and evaluated.

17. Thus, the Plan of Action 2009-2013 adopted in January 2009 within the context of implementing the national policy is based on seven strategies: (i) mainstreaming gender into development agencies, programmes and projects; (ii) improving women's productivity with a view to increasing their income; (iii) improving access to production support services; (iv) improving access to social services; (v) promoting equitable participation in the management of power, respect for rights and suppression of violence; (vi) strengthening institutional mechanisms; and (vii) improving women's social status.

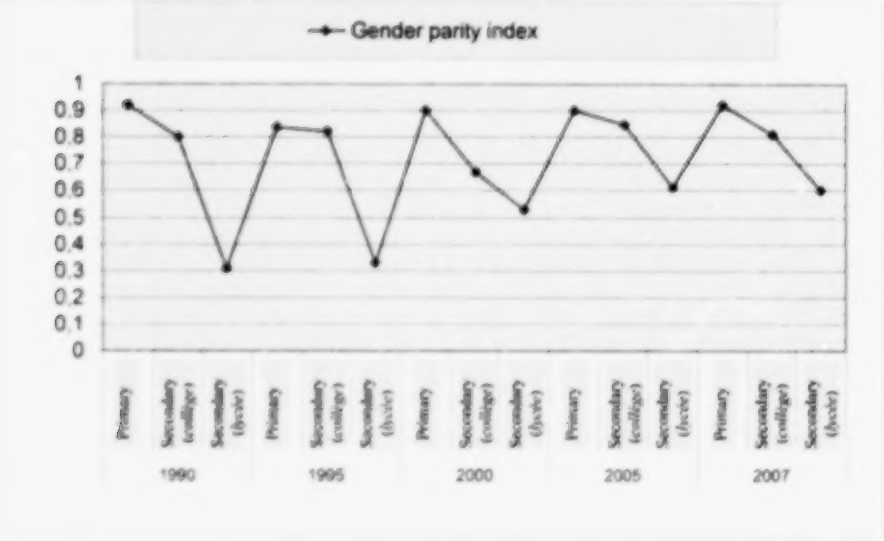
4. Assessment, progress achieved, constraints, lessons learned and challenges in implementing strategies

18. In order to reduce gender inequality in the various development sectors, issues have been specifically addressed in six areas: (i) reduction of gender inequalities in

primary and secondary education; (ii) improvement of maternal health; (iii) equal participation in administrative and political life; (iv) equal participation in economic life; (v) reduction of violence against girls and women; (vi) strengthening of institutional mechanisms.

4.1. Reduction of gender inequality in primary and secondary education

Figure I
Trends in gender parity in primary and secondary education



Source: Performance indicators of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and Literacy, 2000-2007.

19. The first cycle shows slight year-to-year fluctuations and no significant peaks. The gender parity index was 0.92 in 1990, 0.84 in 1995, 0.90 in 2000, and 0.92 in 2007. Girls' enrolment begins to decrease in the second year of school, with the sharpest decline coming right after the first year of primary school. In the first cycle of secondary school (*collège*), there are huge variations in the number of students. The index — 0.80 in 1990 and 0.82 in 1997 — dropped to 0.71 in 2002 and then rose slightly, attaining 0.81 in 2007. In the second cycle of secondary school (*lycée*), the index went from 0.35 in 1991 to 0.53 in 2000 and 0.60 in 2007.

20. Indigenous children still have little opportunity to attend school. According to the 2006 "Knowledge, attitudes and practices (CAP)" survey taken in indigenous areas, more than 65 per cent of adolescents are not enrolled in school. However, this situation is changing significantly among the indigenous population, particularly in the 10- to 13-year-old age bracket (60 per cent of boys and 45 per cent of girls).

21. Despite the considerable efforts of Government authorities to encourage school attendance, the school drop-out rate is high and a significant number of girls drop out of school before they achieve sustainable literacy.

22. This drop-out rate is attributable to, inter alia: (i) decreased purchasing power of some parents who cannot afford school tuition, school supplies, uniforms, or transport to school for their children; (ii) girls who, disillusioned by their elder siblings' failure to find employment, turn to the informal sector; (iii) sexual harassment; (iv) premature household responsibilities; (v) burden of domestic chores; (vi) early pregnancy; (vii) the pitfalls of adolescence.

23. Since the beginning of the decade, the Congo has engaged in specific sectoral actions to revitalize the educational system and guarantee primary education to all children. These actions include: (i) ensuring that pregnant girls are not excluded from the school system; (ii) the abolition of school tuition; (iii) free textbooks; (iv) recruitment of 9,755 teachers, including 7,162 primary school teachers, between 2000 and 2009; (v) implementation of a programme to build 581 new classrooms and install more than 11,000 desk tables since 2005; (vi) resumption of adult literacy activities and non-formal basic education at the national level.

24. While the quantitative results are fairly satisfactory, much remains to be done when it comes to quality. Indeed, 5 per cent of school-age children remain outside the mandatory education cycle. This category comprises girls, children of very poor parents (50.7 per cent living below the poverty line), indigenous children (32.6 per cent of the boys and 21 per cent of the girls) and children with mental or motor disabilities.

25. Gender parity in primary school is achievable by 2015 if the Government authorities make good on measures to ensure free access to primary education and school textbooks and if partners maintain their support.

26. While boys consistently outnumber girls in secondary school, those gaps are narrowing. Given the current situation, however, parity cannot be achieved by 2015. Measures must be taken to protect adolescent girls from sexual harassment and the growing phenomenon of unwanted pregnancies.

Challenges to be met

27. The challenges that must be met in order to keep girls in school and ensure progress towards achieving the target are:

- Introduction of affirmative action: merit scholarships to enable girls to pursue higher studies, internships for girls;
- Promulgation of the law on the protection of children and adoption of implementing legislation, taking into account the specific needs of girls;
- Elaboration and implementation of a recovery policy for girls who are not enrolled in school or have dropped out with a view to their socio-economic integration;
- Introduction of a policy to sensitize parents and local communities to the need to guarantee the conditions for keeping girls in school and ensuring their success.

28. **In view of these challenges, the Government of the Republic undertakes to:**

- **Developing and implementing a policy to provide equal access to, retain and ensure the success of girls in the educational system;**
- **Improving the system for collecting gender-disaggregated statistics.**

4.2. Improvement of maternal health

29. Reproductive health is characterized by a large number of maternal deaths. Estimated at 890 deaths per 100,000 live births in 1990, the maternal mortality rate increased to 1,100 in 2002 and declined to 781 in 2005. Young women between 20 and 24 years of age are the most severely affected (32 per cent), followed by adolescents under the age of 20 (25 per cent).

30. The primary causes of maternal death include: induced abortion (41 per cent), post-partum haemorrhage (40 per cent), post-abortion infection (18.8 per cent), post-partum infection (12.7 per cent), hypertension-eclampsia (11 per cent), obstructed labour (0.8 per cent) and its consequences (uterine rupture, vesico-vaginal fistula, sepsis), HIV/AIDS (6 per cent), malaria and others (20 per cent).

31. Post-natal consultations are still uncommon among mothers: only one out of four women sees a doctor after delivery. In addition, family planning services are virtually non-existent in health facilities, which explains the low rate of contraceptive use by women between 15 and 49 years of age, estimated at 14 per cent.

32. According to the Demographic and Health Survey, 27 per cent of girls have become mothers or have been pregnant before the age of 19 (just over one out of four girls between 15 and 18 years of age). These high-risk health practices (HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), pregnancy, abortion) are largely due to sexual initiation at a very young age (24 per cent of women between 15 and 24 years of age have had sexual relations before the age of 15), and ignorance and poor use of modern contraceptive methods, in addition to a context of widespread joblessness.

33. In terms of nutrition, 13.1 per cent of women between 15 and 49 years of age are underweight, while 70 per cent of pregnant women and 60 per cent of nursing women are anaemic.

34. The challenges are even more evident at the sector level and include: (i) the prohibitive cost of maternal health care in terms of household purchasing power; (ii) a lack of professionalism and ethics among workers; (iii) a dearth of facilities offering emergency obstetric care; (iv) a lack of basic materials and equipment at health facilities; (v) inadequate coordination of actions and financial resources.

35. In order to reduce the number of maternal deaths, the Government has formulated and adopted several policies and programmes, including the "*National Health-care Development Plan, 2007-2011*", the "*Health-service Development Programme*" and the "*National road map to accelerate the reduction of maternal, neonatal and infant mortality by 2015*". These initiatives have brought about a significant reduction in the maternal mortality rate, which went from 890 deaths per 100,000 live births in 1990, to 1,100 in 2002 to 781 in 2005.

36. Activities to improve maternal health include integrating prenatal follow-up care within all front-line health facilities (Integrated Health Centres) and hospitals; making malaria treatment free to mothers and children up to 15 years of age; provision of free medical care to people living with HIV/AIDS; distributing insecticide-treated mosquito nets to mothers; provision of equipment and medication for basic and emergency obstetric and neonatal care to Integrated Health Centres and national referral hospitals; on-site training in/review of basic and emergency

obstetric and neonatal care and comprehensive first-aid care for maternal health-care workers and at Integrated Health Centres; systematic vaccination of pregnant women and children; systematic administration of iron to mothers and vitamin A to children and to mothers post-partum.

37. All of these programmes and strategies have benefited from a vertical system of implementation, from the central to the most decentralized level. They have transformed the Ministry of Health's community-based policies into a reality and have been effectively integrated into the various guidelines and technical instructions for the application of basic measures for health care and services.

38. However, these programmes have suffered from: (i) a lack of political will to implement the National Health-care Development Plan; (ii) limited funding for the health sector; (iii) a lack of direction in efforts to strengthen the health districts (all the referral hospitals, health centres and Integrated Health Centres within a given department); (iv) people's lack of involvement in their own health concerns.

39. The variation in maternal mortality rates by age group demonstrates that poor quality of care during pregnancy, delivery and post-partum is a problem.

40. This is a paradoxical situation, given that 88 per cent of pregnant women receive prenatal care, 86.2 per cent of deliveries are assisted by qualified staff and 82 per cent of women give birth in a health-care facility.

41. The goal of reaching a maternal mortality rate of 390 deaths per 100,000 live births by 2015 cannot be achieved if current trends persist.

Challenges to be met

42. The challenges to be met in order to reduce maternal mortality and ensure progress towards achieving the target include:

- Strengthening management capacity at all levels by training staff responsible for prenatal care, deliveries and post-natal consultations;
- Increasing the budget in order to make low-cost services available, maintain and improve facilities and improve the system for supplying medications;
- Transferring responsibility for 60 per cent of expenses related to prenatal consultations and the provision of free Caesarean sections to the Government authorities;
- Expanding the programme for prevention of mother-to-child transmission throughout the entire country in the context of the fight against HIV/AIDS.

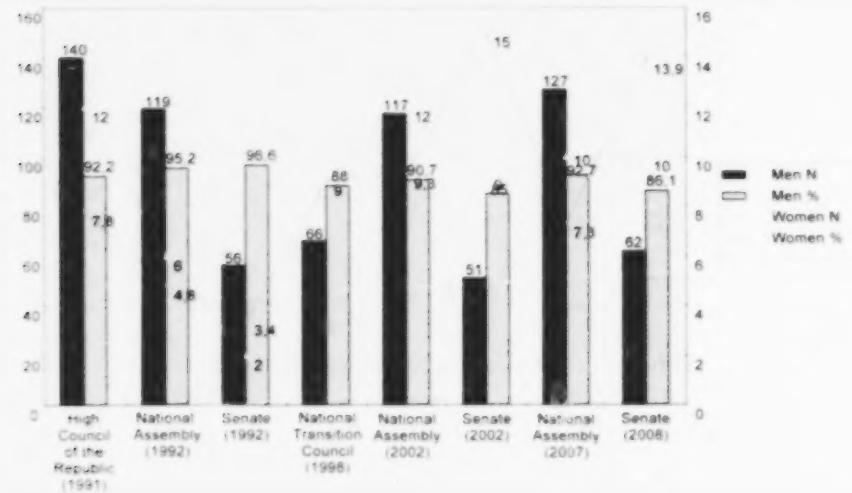
43. **The Government undertakes to:**

- **Make the reduction of the maternal mortality rate to 390 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births by 2015 a major priority;**
- **Implement the "National road map to accelerate the reduction of maternal, neonatal and infant mortality by 2015".**

4.3. Equal participation in administrative and political life

44. The political participation process is marked by insufficient community involvement in decision-making processes and by the exclusion of certain social groups, including women. Although the adoption of legislation reflects a degree of political will, the distribution of power at the executive, legislative, judicial and political levels is below the quotas for women's participation within all decision-making bodies and elected posts proposed by the African Union and the United Nations, respectively.

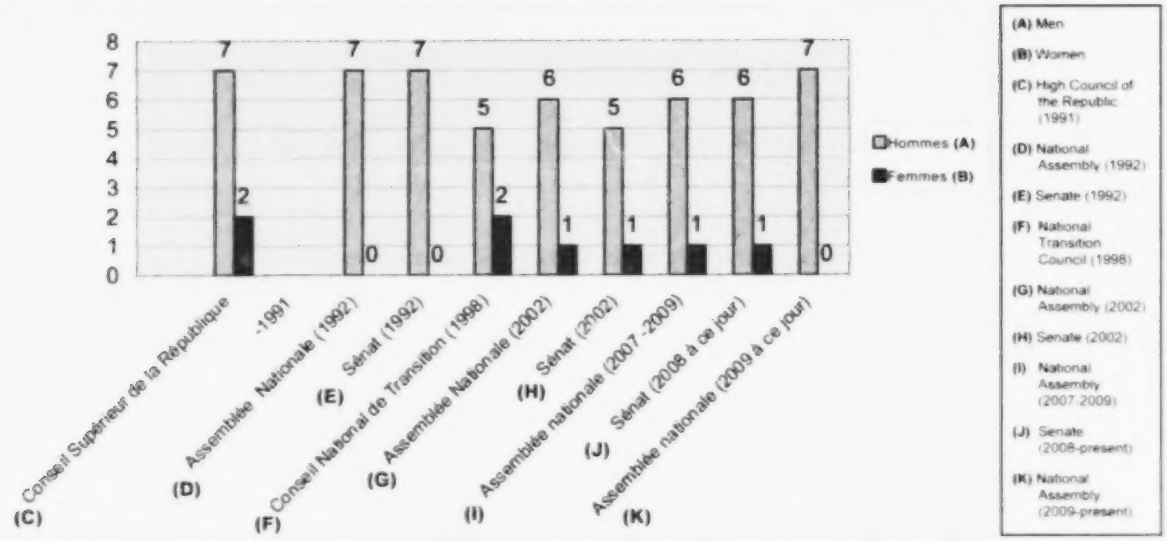
Figure II
Distribution of parliamentarians, by legislative body and gender



Source: Senate and National Assembly records.

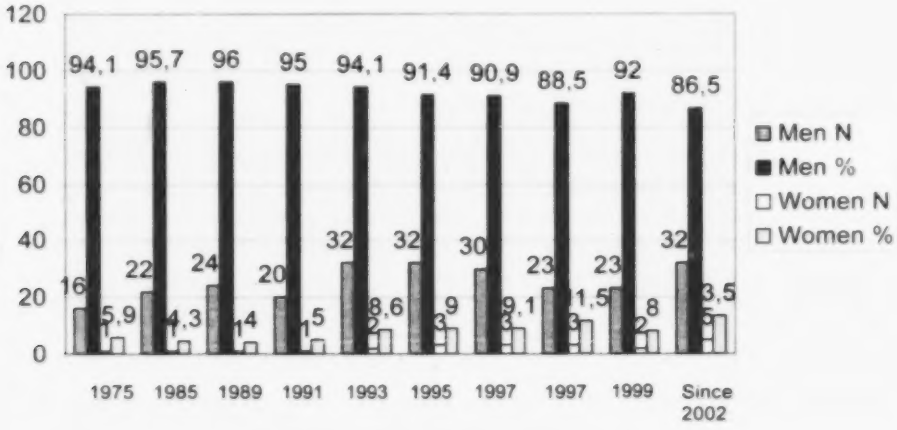
45. Figure II shows that since the 1990s, the number of parliamentary seats held by women rose from 7.9 per cent in 1991 to 7.12 per cent in 1992, 24.3 per cent in 2002 and 21.2 per cent in 2007 and 2008. Yet the mere presence of women in Parliament does not mean that these positions are equally shared in a realm generally dominated by men; the proportion of women in Parliament has never surpassed the threshold of two out of seven members, as demonstrated in figure III below.

Figure III
Distribution of members of Parliament, by legislative body and gender



Source: Records of the Senate and the National Assembly.

Figure IV
Distribution of members of Government by terms of office and gender



46. Within the Government, female representation was at 5.0 per cent in 1991, 9.0 per cent in 1995 and has remained unchanged at 13 per cent since the 2000s, as indicated in figure IV.

47. Within the high-level institutions of the Republic, women made up 14.3 per cent of the Supreme Court, 11.1 per cent of the Constitutional Court, 30 per cent of

the National Human Rights Commission, 16.6 per cent of the Court of Accounts and Budgetary Discipline and 9 per cent of the Freedom of Communication Council.

Table 1
Local government administration, by gender (2002 to the present)

	Men		*Women*	
Institution	*N*	*Per cent*	*N*	*Per cent*
Prefectures	12	100	00	0.0
Sub-prefectures (2008)	86	100	00	0.0
Presidents of departmental councils (2008)	11	100	00	0.0
Secretaries general of departments	11	91.6	01	8.4
Mayors of communes	06	100	00	0.0
Local councils (2008)	740	86.5	116	13.5

48. During the 1990s, women held the following posts in local government: one first deputy mayor in the commune of Brazzaville, eight mayors of arrondissements, twelve secretaries general of regional councils or arrondissements. From 2001 to 2003, women held the following posts: one second deputy mayor of a commune; two mayors of arrondissements; one sub-prefect; seven secretaries general of arrondissements and of department and/or district councils. Since 2008, 12 per cent of the number of departmental and municipal councils and 8.5 per cent of secretaries general of departments have been women. There are no women prefects, council presidents, commune mayors or sub-prefects.

Table 2
Distribution of leadership positions within ministries

	Men		*Women*		
Post	*N*	*Per cent*	*N*	*Per cent*	*Total*
Head of Department	36	92.3	03	7.7	39
Counsellor	96	89.7	11	10.3	107
Director-General	81	87.1	12	12.9	93
Director of central department	328	89.4	39	10.6	367
Chief of Section	301	94.1	19	5.9	320

Source: Data collected from 25 ministries (January 2009).[1]

[1] These included the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of the Economy and Finances, the Ministry of Territorial Administration, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Maritime Fishing, the Ministry of Maritime Transport, the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation, the Ministry of Scientific Research, the Ministry of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, the Ministry of Commerce, the Ministry of National Defence, the Ministry of Tourism, Health, the Ministry of Sports, the Ministry of Technical and Vocational Training, the Ministry of Higher Education, the Ministry for Civil Service Affairs, the Ministry of Planning and Land Management, the Ministry of Hydrocarbons, the Ministry of Energy, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, the Ministry for the Advancement of Women, the Ministry of Communication, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Cooperation and Humanitarian Affairs.

Table 3
Distribution of leadership positions within the Parliament

	Men		*Women*		
Post	*N*	*Per cent*	*N*	*Per cent*	*Total*
Head of department	14	100	00	00	14
Counsellor	86	95.6	04	4.4	90
Secretary-General	01	86.3	01	13.7	02
Deputy Secretary-General	02	100	00	00	02
Director of central department	09	81.8	02	18.2	11
President of permanent commission	13	100	00	00	13

Source: Secretariat of the Senate and the National Assembly (2009).

49. Within the administration, a study of 27 ministries in 2009 revealed that 7.7 per cent of heads of departments, 10.3 per cent of ministry counsellors, 12.9 per cent of directors-general and 10.6 per cent of directors of central departments were women (table 2).

50. Women make up the majority of political parties and are the mobilizing force. While the legislative and local elections of 2002, 2007 and 2008 were uplifting for women, their leadership role within the parties remains minimal: out of about 100 political organizations, only three are headed by women.

51. However, Congolese women do enjoy a relatively favourable status. They are entitled to the same rights as men, and the discriminatory provisions remaining in the civil, penal and tax codes are currently under review.

52. While in practice, women still face some de facto inequality in the enjoyment of their rights, the following advancements should be noted: (i) the inclusion in the Constitution of 20 January 2002 of a provision (article 8) that guarantees and ensures the advancement and representation of women in all political, electoral and administrative posts; (ii) a rise in the number of women's non-governmental organizations and associations, surpassing the number of self-help groups; (iii) an emerging female political class made up of intellectuals; (iv) the establishment of the Centre for the Promotion of Women in Politics; (v) the development of a practical guide to elections for female candidates; (vi) the adoption of the gender national policy in 2008 and an action plan approved in 2009; (vii) an increase in the number of female candidates in legislative and local elections; (viii) the adoption (under way) of a draft bill on women's representation in political, electoral and administrative positions; and (ix) the signing by the President of the Republic of the African Union Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa.

53. Government authorities have placed special emphasis on addressing gender inequality in all political and development documents (poverty reduction strategy paper and Millennium Development Goals). The current priority is to integrate the issue into all interventions at the sectoral level.

54. Nevertheless, eliminating gender disparity goes back to the social relationships between men and women and the different roles, responsibilities and social functions fulfilled by each. Stereotypes based on sex as well as the established

social order are some of the most deeply rooted concepts and constitute an obstacle to eliminating inequality and disparity and to reconsidering gender roles within the family and society.

55. Changing attitudes inevitably leads to questioning all the ideas that have been internalized since childhood. This process of questioning consequently leads to social mobilization and collective, consensual and participatory action, supported by deliberate efforts to change the systems of traditional values that underpin and legitimize stereotypes and discrimination.

56. A second challenge lies in increasing women's level of engagement with the issue through lobbying and advocacy work in associations, political parties and elsewhere in order to build broad popular support.

57. All of these actions are linked to political will which, through the implementation of legislation, could lead to the achievement of gender equality in all sectors.

58. Achieving 30 per cent female representation will not be feasible unless the law on women's representation in political, electoral and administrative positions is adopted, together with the necessary implementing legislation.

Challenges to be met

59. Challenges to be met in order to achieve equal participation in administrative and political life and ensure progress towards achieving the target include:

- Adopting the draft legislation on women's representation in political, electoral and administrative positions;
- Revising existing legislation to include a gender perspective, in particular the civil, family, tax and penal codes;
- Developing and implementing strategies to reduce the cultural barriers that impede women's advancement.

60. In view of women's low level of participation in decision-making bodies, the Government is committed to making women's representation in all positions a policy goal with a view to achieving 30 per cent representation by 2015.

4.4. Equal participation in economic life

61. Women's integration into the wage system has been commensurate with their access to the educational system and professional development. They have progressively been hired to do jobs that men no longer wish to perform, such as teaching at the primary level and secretarial work.

Table 4
Staffing trends in the civil service

	Men		Women		
Year	*N*	*Per cent*	*N*	*Per cent*	*Total*
1990	36 716	66.6	18 414	33.4	55 130
1993	36 849	65.8	19 134	34.2	54 983
2002	36 717	67.0	18 105	33.0	54 822
2004	45 769	67.5	22 068	32.5	67 837

Source: Ministry of Labour and Social Security (1990) and Ministry for Civil Service Affairs and Administrative Reform (2002).

62. From 1990 to the present, the proportion of women has never exceeded 35 per cent. Indeed, in 1990, the records of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security showed that there were 55,130 civil servants, of whom 18,414, 33.4 per cent, were women.

63. According to the census of civil servants carried out by the Ministry for Civil Service Affairs in 2002, 33.0 per cent of civil servants were women.

64. Congolese law provides for the equality of men and women, except as regards the provisions relating to maternity leave. The Labour Code, which was revised in 1982, guarantees women's equal access to employment, equal pay and the right to maternity leave.

65. However, an examination of the various sectors of activity clearly shows that men and women are positioned differently in the labour market. In the best-paid job categories there are more men than women. In the private sector, an obstacle to the promotion of women is their higher rate of absenteeism, due to a variety of causes which are often related to their reproductive role.

66. It appears that working in the informal sector is a strategy adopted by households to diversify their income and a refuge for the young (boys and girls), who are increasingly exposed to the ravages of the economic crisis. Although such work allows families to increase their income and even gives women a certain degree of autonomy, it is precarious and insecure.

Table 5
Employment in the informal sector, by gender

Economic Sector	*Men %*	*Women %*	*Total %*
Agriculture	25	75	100
Livestock	87 (large animals)	13 (poultry)	100
Processing of agricultural products	Nearly 0	Nearly 100	100
Processing and sale of fishing products	40	60	100
Retailing and other activities	36	64	100

Source: Ministry for the Advancement of Women and the Integration of Women in Development, 2010.

67. In agriculture, women represent nearly 75 per cent of the labour force. They are involved in the entire food production cycle (representing 60 to 80 per cent of the workforce), including harvesting, storage, processing (representing nearly 100 per cent of the workforce) and marketing.

68. Rural women use rudimentary and archaic means of production (hoes, machetes) that make their labour even more back-breaking. Women's workload is especially burdensome in the absence of appropriate technologies designed to reduce the time they need to spend on domestic chores and on the production, processing and storage of agricultural products. Lack of access to fuel and electricity is also an obstacle to the use of motorized equipment.

69. In addition, women must travel long distances to obtain water and firewood. Such excessive labour without respite significantly undermines their health, leading to premature ageing, lower productivity and increased morbidity and mortality. Moreover, women can only acquire land by inheriting it from their mother or father, through marriage or by leasing or purchasing it.

70. In the fishing industry, men and women perform different tasks. Commercial fishing and fishing on large bodies of water remain men's work, especially when practised at night. Women catch fish using traps, by hook and line, and by draining ponds and building weirs. Women carry out 60 per cent of the processing and marketing of fishing products. They also manufacture fishing equipment (e.g., baskets, traps and creels).

71. Hunting is done exclusively by men. Game meat may be sold by women but the proceeds generally go to the man, who decides how to spend them.

72. In the informal sector, women face various difficulties, the greatest of which is gaining access to credit through the formal financial system. The requirements of most banking institutions exclude the majority of women. This is because loan applications must include a pay slip, a trading certificate, an advance operating account and a contribution of at least 20 per cent. These terms force women to turn to traditional financial mechanisms such as tontines or to moneylenders who charge usurious rates.

73. Women working in the informal sector are not entitled to any benefits unless they receive family allowances or a pension as the wife or widow of a registered employee or civil servant.

74. Women's economic empowerment by 2015 will not be achievable unless the authorities develop and implement incentives and protective measures in the agricultural and commercial sectors and promote all commercial activities. Restoring farm roads and creating a women's development fund could accelerate women's economic empowerment.

Challenges to be met

75. Challenges to be met in order to achieve women's equal participation in economic life and ensure progress towards achieving the target include:

- Defining guidelines for the establishment of gender-disaggregated statistics, so as to accurately report on the work done by women in all development sectors;
- Reducing women's workload;

- Revising national commercial legislation and lending policies, taking into account women's needs, motivations and the constraints they face;
- Promoting a skills training and job training policy.

76. The Government undertakes to:

- Prepare and implement a strategy for the economic empowerment of women;
- Promote a lending policy benefiting low-income women.

4.8. Reducing violence against women and girls

77. Violence against women and girls, although often invisible, is omnipresent in Congolese society. Despite a legal framework that is in line with international standards, acts of violence are on the rise and do not seem to be regarded as anything out of the ordinary.

78. In the realm of marriage, a number of traditional discriminatory practices persist, including widowhood rites, the levirate and the sororate. Under the paternal roof, incest and rape are perpetrated by fathers, stepfathers, fathers-in-law, brothers, uncles and cousins. Sexual harassment is among the daily affronts that women and girls are subjected to at home, school and work and in the street.

79. Physical abuse is undoubtedly the most common form of violence inflicted on women. It is not known how widespread marital rape is because the victims are reluctant to report it.

80. Rape committed during armed conflict has remained shrouded in silence. Following the outbreak of hostilities in 1993, there was little focus on or study of it. Beginning in 1998, however, these crimes have been revealed by studies carried out by the Government with the support of development partners.

81. In order to remedy this situation, a number of measures have been taken, including: (i) the ratification of the majority of international human rights instruments (the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol, and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa); (ii) the development, adoption and implementation of national instruments and mechanisms to guarantee the principle of legal equality between men and women; (iii) a penal code that criminalizes physical, corporal, sexual and psychological violence; (iv) the establishment of an observatory to monitor gender-based violence; (v) the establishment of a violence hotline; (vi) the establishment of legal clinics to provide counselling, assistance, orientation and care for female victims of violence; (vii) the drafting of legislation on sexual harassment and violence against women and girls.

82. Sadly, Congolese society appears to regard gender-based violence as normal, despite laws, customs, traditions and trends. Violence against women is a reflection of the reigning patriarchal practices, legitimized by tradition and religion which advocate women's submission and emphasize male superiority. They are a means for men to dominate women, a way of reminding women that they are inferior beings, and consequently do not have a say over their own bodies.

83. Moreover, men, and especially women, are not aware of either the national legislation or international treaties, which means they do not turn to the court

system in order to assert their rights. A lack of familiarity with legislation and court procedures, dysfunctional and remote judicial structures, the de facto dual system of customary law and modern law, and the fear of "witchcraft" are all factors that limit full enjoyment of their rights, by the Congolese people, particularly women.

84. Furthermore, rape cases are not heard by regular courts, but rather during sessions of the Criminal Court at which decisions are made by citizens' juries. However, it should be noted that sessions of this court are not held on a regular basis; the official reason given is financial constraints. This problem perpetuates a vicious circle of impunity and criminality.

85. The impunity of perpetrators creates a sense of resignation among victims, trivializes the crime and aggravates criminality and violence in Congolese society.

Challenges to be met

86. Challenges to be met in order to reduce violence against girls and women include:

- Providing tools to encourage ownership of legal instruments to those affected by violence, primarily the victims (widows, women, girls), but also the perpetrators;
- Increasing the justice department's funding capacity to convene annual sessions of the Criminal Court;
- Increasing the penalties for sex crimes.

87. **In order to strengthen the protection of women's rights, the Government undertakes to:**

- **Review the penal code of 13 August 1980, taking into account the emerging evidence of violence, including cases of rape, paedophilia and sexual harassment in school and professional environments;**
- **Enforce legislation that criminalize perpetrators of violence against girls and women.**

4.6. Strengthening of institutional mechanisms

Challenges to be met

88. Challenges to be met in order to strengthen institutional mechanisms include:

- Defining and disseminating the institutional framework for the national gender policy;
- Establishing a framework for coordinating gender as a cross-cutting issue at the governmental level;
- Implementing a system for collecting, processing and disseminating gender-disaggregated data across all sectors;
- Establishing gender units within all ministries.

89. **In order to improve the visibility of gender as an issue, the Government undertakes to:**

- **Mainstream gender into ministerial departments' development policies, programmes and projects;**
- **Strengthen the human, technical, material and financial resources of the ministry responsible for gender issues.**

5. Partnerships and funding requirements

Partnerships

90. Following its attainment of the completion point in the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative, indications of donor confidence and a favourable national outlook, the Congolese Government is boldly reaching out to new partners (bilateral, international non-governmental organizations) to seek assistance in the full realization of its gender policy.

91. The Government will work with non-State actors, development partners and donors, who will provide technical support and financial assistance to implement the national gender policy, in line with the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. The principles of the Declaration are the following:

(a) ownership by the recipient country over its development policies and strategies, including improved coordination of actions to support national strategies;

(b) harmonization of common arrangements and simplification of procedures;

(c) alignment, requiring donors to base their overall support on the partner country's national development strategies, institutions and procedures;

(d) managing for results;

(e) mutual accountability to ensure that donors and partners meet their commitments.

92. The Government of the Republic of the Congo is dedicated to developing, coordinating and implementing plans, laws and other guidelines to meet the Goal. Furthermore, it will conduct follow-up and periodic evaluations of progress made towards meeting the targets in coordination with all stakeholders at the national and international level.

93. To that end, the Government will establish, within the National Council for Gender Equity, a mechanism for the targeted and optimal allocation, in coordination with development partners, of assistance in the six priority areas of its strategy on gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Resource mobilization

94. The goal of resource mobilization is to better predict aid, thus enabling the Congo to successfully conduct its national programmes to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment.

95. Funding for the implementation of the Gender Policy Action Plan, estimated at a total of 8,325,000,000 FCFA (US$ 16,650,000), will require significant support from development partners. Of the amount indicated, 4,995,000,000 FCFA (US$ 9,990,000) can be drawn from the national budget. Another 3.33 billion FCFA (US$ 6.66 million) will be needed.

Conclusion

96. Having overcome its status as the African country with the highest debt per capita, the Republic of the Congo is now in a much better position than it was 10 years ago to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

97. The contributions of the various economic sectors to the gross domestic product are extremely unequal, with the primary sector accounting for 4.5 per cent, the secondary sector for 73.7 per cent (of which 63.3 per cent comes from the petroleum sector) and the tertiary sector for 21.8 per cent.

10-37218